

How to Pray Istikharah



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful





Assalamu'alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu,

We pray that this message reaches you
in good health and imaan.

On behalf of our AMAU Academy team, we would like
to present to you these compiled notes that we have
prepared to make your journey with us a lot easier.

Our notes are compiled by the AMAU Admin team
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to be made, kindly inform us via our email
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May Allah make our paths toward seeking
beneficial knowledge easy and kindle our hearts
with sincerity and gratefulness
towards Him.

Jazakumullahu Khayran



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Table of Contents

06

Chapter One

Reflecting Over the Du'aa
for Istikharah

11

Chapter Two

When to Pray Istikharah?

14

Chapter Three

How to Pray It and
What to Do Next?

17

Chapter Four

Seeking Advice vs.
Praying Istikharah

Glossary



جل جلاله | Jalla Jalāluhu
Allah the Most Exalted



صلى الله عليه وسلم | Sallāllāhu Alayhi Wa Sallam
Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him



رضي الله عنه | RadiAllahu `anhu
May Allah be pleased with him

Reflecting Over the Du'aa for Istikharah

Chapter One

As human beings, we are frequently faced with choices throughout our lives.

These choices range from significant life decisions, such as which job to accept or whom to marry, to more everyday matters like which car to buy, which apartment to rent, or which school to attend. The list of decisions we must make is seemingly endless.

However, despite the abundance of choices, we often find ourselves uncertain about what is truly best for us. This uncertainty extends not only to our worldly affairs but also to our ultimate well-being in the Hereafter.

Recognizing this human limitation, with the guidance and permission of Allah ﷻ, the Prophet ﷺ legislated for us the act of worship known as Istikharah.

The term "Istikharah" is derived from the Arabic root word "خَيْرَ" (khiyara), which means to choose. The addition of the letters "seen" (س) and "ta" (ت) in the Arabic language signifies the act of seeking. Therefore, Istikharah means to seek the best choice or to seek the good in a decision.

The scholars have emphasised that Istikharah is about seeking out the best choice by turning to Allah ﷻ, asking for His guidance in making decisions.

1 Before Islam

Before the advent of Islam, pagan practices were prevalent for making decisions, such as drawing lots or interpreting the flight of birds. These methods were deeply rooted in shirk (associating partners with Allah), and they were widespread among the polytheists of Mecca and beyond. Islam, however, replaced these superstitious practices with the worship known as Istikharah, thereby abolishing shirk and establishing Tawheed.

Allah said in the Qur'an:

1 حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةُ وَالْدَّمُ وَلَحْمُ الْخِنْزِيرِ وَمَا أُهْلَ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ بِهِ وَالْمُنْخَنِقَةُ وَالْمَوْقُوذَةُ وَالْمُتَرَدِّيَةُ
وَالنَّطِيحَةُ وَمَا أَكَلَ السَّبْعُ إِلَّا مَا ذَكَيْتُمْ وَمَا ذُبِحَ عَلَى النُّصُبِ وَأَنْ تَسْتَقْسِمُوا بِالْأَزْلَمِ

Prohibited to you are dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allāh, and [those animals] killed by strangling or by a violent blow or by a head-long fall or by the goring of horns, and those from which a wild animal has eaten, except what you [are able to] slaughter [before its death], and those which are sacrificed on stone altars, and [prohibited is] that you seek decision through divining arrows.

[Surah Al-Ma'idah 3]

2 The Practice of Istikharah

When the Prophet ﷺ introduced Istikharah, it was as a replacement for the pre-Islamic practices of seeking guidance through superstitious means. As mentioned before, the pagan Arabs used to draw lots or observe birds' flight patterns to make decisions.

These practices were firmly rooted in their belief in forces other than Allah. However, Allah in His infinite mercy replaced these practices with the pure worship of Istikharah, where the believer seeks Allah's guidance directly.

As mentioned in the Hadith narrated by Jabir ibn Abdullah رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ, the Prophet ﷺ said, **"If anyone of you thinks of doing any job he should offer a two Raka`aat prayer other than the compulsory ones and say (after the prayer) (the Du'aa of Istikharah follows)."**

This instruction from the Prophet ﷺ shows the mercy of Allah in guiding His creation away from shirk towards reliance on Him alone.

The ahadith regarding Istikharah have been reported by many Sahābah, some of them are:

1 Jabir ibn Abdullah

3 Abu Bakr as-Siddeeq

2 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ūd

4 Abu Ayyūb al-Ansari

3 Hadith on Istikharah

It has been narrated by Jabir bin `Abdullah:

2

قَالَ كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يُعَلِّمُنَا الْإِسْتِخَارَةَ فِي الْأُمُورِ كَمَا يُعَلِّمُنَا السُّورَةَ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ يَقُولُ " إِذَا هَمَّ أَحَدُكُمْ بِالْأَمْرِ فَلْيَرْكَعْ رَكَعَتَيْنِ مِنْ غَيْرِ الْفَرِيضَةِ ثُمَّ لِيَقُلِ اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْتَخِيرُكَ بِعِلْمِكَ وَأَسْتَقْدِرُكَ بِقُدْرَتِكَ، وَأَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ فَضْلِكَ الْعَظِيمِ، فَإِنَّكَ تَقْدِرُ وَلَا أَقْدِرُ وَتَعْلَمُ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتَ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ، اللَّهُمَّ إِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ خَيْرٌ لِي فِي دِينِي وَمَعَاشِي وَعَاقِبَةِ أَمْرِي - أَوْ قَالَ عَاجِلِ أَمْرِي وَآجِلِهِ - فَاقْدُرْهُ لِي وَيَسِّرْهُ لِي ثُمَّ بَارِكْ لِي فِيهِ، وَإِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ شَرٌّ لِي فِي دِينِي وَمَعَاشِي وَعَاقِبَةِ أَمْرِي - أَوْ قَالَ فِي عَاجِلِ أَمْرِي وَآجِلِهِ - فَاصْرِفْهُ عَنِّي وَاصْرِفْنِي عَنْهُ، وَاقْدُرْ لِي الْخَيْرَ حَيْثُ كَانَ ثُمَّ أَرْضِنِي بِهِ

The Prophet ﷺ used to teach us the way of doing Istikhara (Istikhara means to ask Allah to guide one to the right sort of action concerning any job or a deed), in all matters as he taught us the Suras of the Qur'an. He said, "If anyone of you thinks of doing any job he should offer a two Raka`aat prayer other than the compulsory ones and say (after the prayer): --

'Allahumma inni astakhiruka bi'ilmika, Wa astaqdiruka bi-qudratika, Wa as'alaka min fadlika Al-`azlm Fa-innaka taqdiru Wala aqdiru, Wa ta'lamu Wala a'lamu, Wa anta 'allamu l-ghuyub. Allahumma, in kunta ta'lam anna hadha-lamra Khairun li fi dini wa ma'ashi wa'aqibati `Amri (or 'ajili `Amri wa'ajilihi) Faqdirhu wa yas-sirhu li thumma barik li Fihi, Wa in kunta ta'lamu anna hadha-lamra shar-run li fi dini wa ma'ashi wa'aqibati `Amri (or fi'ajili `Amri wa ajilihi) Fasrifhu anni was-rifni anhu. Waqdir li al-khaira haithu kana Thumma ardini bihi.'

(O Allah! I ask guidance from Your knowledge, And Power from Your Might and I ask for Your great blessings. You are capable and I am not. You know and I do not and You know the unseen. O Allah! If You know that this job is good for my religion and my subsistence and in my Hereafter--(or said: If it is better for my present and later needs)--Then You ordain it for me and make it easy for me to get, And then bless me in it, and if You know that this job is harmful to me In my religion and subsistence and in the Hereafter--(or said: If it is worse for my present and later needs)--Then keep it away from me and let me be away from it. And ordain for me whatever is good for me, And make me satisfied with it).

[Sahih al-Bukhari 1166]

4 Significance of This Act of Worship

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ would teach his companions the Du'aa for Istikharah with the same emphasis as he taught them the Surahs of the Qur'an. This underlines the importance of Istikharah in a Muslim's life, particularly when faced with making decisions.

5 Understanding the Du'aa for Istikharah

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ begins the Du'aa by extolling and praising Allah ﷻ. He emphasises Allah's attributes that are particularly relevant to the act of Istikharah, highlighting three critical aspects: the might of Allah, His knowledge, and the goodness He ordains for His servants.

Firstly

The Du'aa underscores the might and power of Allah ﷻ. When a believer performs Istikharah, they are acknowledging that only Allah has the power to bring about real change in their life.

This recognition is a true form of Tawakkul—entrusting one's affairs entirely to Allah, relying on His supreme power and wisdom to guide them in the best possible way.

The Prophet ﷺ emphasises this reliance by reminding us that Allah alone controls everything, and thus, it is only through His power that we seek to make the best decisions.

Secondly

The Du'aa highlights Allah's infinite knowledge. The Prophet ﷺ instructs us to seek Allah's guidance through His knowledge because, unlike human beings, whose understanding is limited, Allah's knowledge encompasses all things—past, present, and future.

This is crucial, especially in the context of Istikharah, where we are often uncertain about what lies ahead. Something that may seem beneficial for our worldly life might be detrimental to our Hereafter, and vice versa. Therefore, in acknowledging Allah as Al-‘Aleem (The All-Knowing), we admit our own limitations and place our trust in His perfect wisdom.

The Du'aa then moves on to the request for goodness in the matter at hand. The believer asks Allah to ordain what is best for them, to make it easy, and to bless it. Here, the Du'aa teaches us to seek three things from Allah: to make the matter happen if it is good for us, to ease the process so that we do not face unnecessary hardship, and to grant His blessings in the outcome.

These three requests encapsulate the holistic approach to decision-making in Islam, where one seeks not only the fulfilment of their desires but also Allah's blessings and ease in achieving them.

However, the Du'aa also prepares the believer for the possibility that what they desire may not be good for them. The Prophet ﷺ instructs us to ask Allah to turn the matter away from us if it is bad for our religion, livelihood, or the consequences of our affairs. Moreover, the Du'aa goes a step further by asking Allah to turn our hearts away from that matter, ensuring that we do not yearn for something that could harm us.

This beautiful phrasing reflects a deep understanding of human nature—sometimes, even when a harmful matter is removed from our lives, our hearts may still cling to it. By asking Allah to remove our attachment to it, we seek true detachment from that which is not in our best interest.

Lastly

The Du'aa is a request for contentment. If Allah turns away a matter from us, we ask Him to provide us with what is good and to grant us satisfaction with His decree. Contentment (rida) is a higher station than patience (sabr).

While patience involves enduring difficulties with forbearance, contentment is being pleased with whatever Allah has decreed, fully trusting that His decision is the best, even if it goes against our desires.

This Du'aa, therefore, is not just a supplication for guidance; it is a profound exercise in Tawakkul, humility, and submission to Allah's will. It teaches us to approach decision-making with a deep reliance on Allah's knowledge and power, and to accept His decree with contentment, knowing that He always ordains what is best for His servants.

When to Pray Istikharah?

Chapter Two

One of the most important questions that arises when discussing Istikharah is when it should be performed.

As per the hadith of Jabir ibn Abdullah:



كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يُعَلِّمُ أَصْحَابَهُ الْإِسْتِخَارَةَ فِي الْأُمُورِ كُلِّهَا [...] **Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) used to teach his companions to perform the prayer of Istikhara for each and every matter [...]**
[Sahih al-Bukhari 7390]

While the Hadith mentions "**every matter**," it is important to recognize that this does not mean every single, trivial aspect of daily life requires Istikharah.

It is a general instruction which is specified by the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ.

For instance, it would not be necessary or practical to perform Istikharah for mundane decisions such as what shoes to wear or what meal to eat. The Prophet ﷺ never did this.

1 Istikharah for Worldly Matters

The scholars have clarified that Istikharah is meant for significant decisions that have a substantial impact on one's life.

Examples of worldly matters where Istikharah is highly recommended include:

- Choosing a school, college, or university.
- Deciding on a career path or accepting a job offer.
- Selecting a spouse for marriage.
- Deciding on purchasing a home or a car.
- Making important business decisions.

These are the types of decisions that can have long-lasting effects on a person's life, and for which divine guidance is most needed. Therefore, in such scenarios, Istikharah serves as a means to seek Allah’s guidance in making the best possible choice.

2 Istikharah for Religious Matters

When it comes to religious matters, the question of whether to perform Istikharah can be more complex. Scholars have outlined specific guidelines to determine when Istikharah is appropriate for religious decisions.

1 Obligatory (Wajib) and Prohibited (Haram) Actions

- Istikharah is not to be performed for actions that are clearly obligatory (wajib) or prohibited (haram) in Islam. For example, one would not pray Istikharah to decide whether to perform the five daily prayers, fast during Ramadan, or avoid sinful actions. These matters are already decreed by Allah, and there is no choice involved that requires divine guidance.

- Similarly, Istikharah is not performed to decide whether to engage in haram actions, as these are strictly forbidden and not subject to personal choice.

2 Permissible (Mubah) and Recommended (Mustahabb) Actions

- Istikharah is suitable for permissible actions, where there is a choice to be made, and the outcome is not obligatory or forbidden. For instance, deciding whether to travel for leisure, choosing between two permissible business ventures, or considering a move to a new city are situations where Istikharah would be appropriate.
- For recommended actions, some scholars argue that Istikharah is not necessary since these actions are already encouraged by the Sharee'ah. However, others suggest that Istikharah may still be performed, particularly when specific circumstances make the decision more complex, such as choosing between multiple recommended actions or determining the best timing for them.

This approach can also be applied when one is faced with two obligations and is unsure which to prioritise or when to fulfil them. For example, while performing 'Umrah is obligatory according to many scholars, the timing and details of the journey may require guidance. In such cases, Istikharah can be prayed to seek Allah's help in choosing the best time to perform Umrah, selecting the right group to travel with, or deciding on the most suitable method of travel.

How to Pray It and What to Do Next?

Chapter Three



ONE OF THE MOST COMMON QUESTIONS REGARDING ISTIKHARAH IS THE **TIMING**—WHEN EXACTLY SHOULD ONE PERFORM THIS PRAYER?

Istikharah should not be prayed at the mere inception of a thought or when an idea casually crosses one's mind. For instance, if a person briefly considers doing something without a firm intention, this is not the time for Istikharah.

The Prophet ﷺ emphasised that Istikharah is to be performed when a person wants to do something—when the thought has matured into a genuine intention or decision. This indicates that Istikharah is meant for serious matters where a person is inclined to act but seeks Allah's guidance to ensure the decision is beneficial.

THE STAGES OF ISTIKHARAH

Istikharah can be performed at **two key stages**:

1 When One Has Made a Decision

If a person has decided on a particular course of action but still seeks Allah's blessings and confirmation that this choice is good, Istikharah is appropriate. Even though the decision has been made, the outcome remains uncertain, and the individual seeks Allah's guidance to ensure that the decision brings about goodness (khair) in their affairs.

This is an expression of reliance on Allah's wisdom, acknowledging that only He knows the unseen and what is truly best for us.

2 When Torn Between Two Choices

If a person is caught between two options and is unsure which one to choose, Istikharah is also appropriate. In this scenario, the person asks Allah for help in making the right choice - the one that will bring the most benefit.

Istikharah here acts as a request for divine clarity and direction, helping the person to settle on the best possible decision.

WHAT TO DO AFTER PRAYING ISTIKHARAH?

After performing Istikharah, the **next steps** can vary depending on the situation:

1 If a Decision Has Already Been Made

Those who have already decided on a course of action should proceed with their decision, trusting that if it is not good for them, Allah will move them away from it.

2 If Torn Between Two Choices

For those who are undecided, several approaches can be taken after Istikharah:

Follow the Heart's Inclination: Some scholars suggest that one should proceed with whichever choice the heart leans towards after Istikharah. If the heart feels at ease with a particular decision, it may be seen as a sign that this is the path Allah has made best for them.

Repeat the Istikharah: If after performing Istikharah, the heart remains unsettled or confused, it is permissible to repeat the prayer. This can be done until clarity is achieved, and the heart feels at peace with a particular choice.

Follow Ease: Another approach suggested by scholars is to choose the option that becomes easier to pursue after Istikharah. If one path appears smoother and more facilitated, it may indicate that this is the best choice. Conversely, if obstacles arise in pursuing a particular option, it might be a sign to consider the other alternative.

HOW TO PERFORM ISTIKHARAH

The **method of performing Istikharah** is rooted in the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who provided a clear and simple process:

1 Praying Two Raka'aat (Units of Prayer)

The Istikharah prayer consists of two Raka'aat that should be prayed outside of the obligatory prayers. It is essential to note that these Raka'aat are separate from the daily required prayers, such as Fajr, Dhuhr, Asr, Maghrib and 'Isha. Some scholars say that these two units are to be prayed independently in the form of "Sunnah Mutlaqah".

Additionally, the prayer should not be performed during times when voluntary prayers are prohibited, such as after Fajr until the sun rises or after Asr until the sun sets.

2 Reciting the Du'aa After the Prayer

After completing the two Raka'aat, the individual should recite the Du'aa for Istikharah. There is some discussion among scholars regarding whether the Du'aa should be recited within the prayer or after completing it.

However, the more straightforward opinion, as derived from the Hadith, is to recite the Du'aa after finishing the prayer. The Prophet's ﷺ instruction was "فَلْيَرْكَعْ رَكَعَتَيْنِ مِنْ غَيْرِ الْفَرِيضَةِ ثُمَّ لِيَقُلْ" [let him pray two Raka'aat and then afterwards say...]

The word "ثُمَّ" in the hadith indicates that the Du'aa should be recited after the prayer is completed.

Seeking Advice vs. Praying Istikharah

Chapter Four

Finally, an important question arises:

“

Should we seek advice from others
if we are already planning to pray
istikharah regarding a matter?

”

1 The Importance of Seeking Advice

The scholars emphasise that it is always good to take advice from people, especially when you are about to do something major in your life. Seeking advice from different people—such as your father, mother, siblings, friends, or the elderly in the community who have a lot of experience—is beneficial. These individuals can offer valuable insights based on their knowledge and experiences.

However, the question arises: ***Should this advice be sought before or after performing Istikharah?***

2 The Proper Sequence: Advice Before Istikharah

Some scholars argue that it is not appropriate to seek advice from others after you have already asked Allah ﷻ through Istikharah. They consider it better to seek people’s advice before performing Istikharah.

This is because it is seen as disrespectful to ask people for their opinions after you have asked Allah ﷻ for guidance. Therefore, the recommended approach is to consult others first, and then, as the final step, perform Istikharah.

This sequence of actions ensures that you gather all necessary information and perspectives before turning to Allah for divine guidance. It reflects the proper etiquette in seeking counsel from both people and Allah ﷻ.

3 Istikharah as a Form of Tawakkul

Istikharah is not just a simple prayer; it is an act of worship that demonstrates a Muslim's reliance on Allah ﷻ.

It shows the Muslim's Tawakkul (trust) in Allah ﷻ and their belief in His power, might, mercy, and knowledge. As part of Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah, we affirm and accept all of Allah's attributes, and this is reflected in the act of Istikharah.

As Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله said, true reliance on Allah ﷻ can only come from a person who affirms Allah's ﷻ perfect Names and Attributes.



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